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ABSTRACT

Ways in which program innovators, policy developers, and educational researchers think about and engage in disseminating innovations to schools can prove a major barrier to reform. A process for effective dissemination using the coaching model in the accelerated schools program is described here. Accelerated schools draw on three principles: unity of purpose, empowerment coupled with responsibility, and building on strengths. To help spread this philosophy, educators from the schools and from the central office are trained as primary disseminators. The rapid growth of accelerated schools is mainly due to these trained coaches who either work at the district level or who are responsible for the implementation of the accelerated schools model at their own school. An examination of an evolving coaching model at the University of New Orleans Accelerated Schools Center, a comparison of the effectiveness of district coaches versus inhouse coaches, and an overview of the coaching model at the National Center for Accelerated Schools shows that the coaching model must be adapted for certain conditions. The National Center requires a large pool of highly qualified applicants to work full-time at offsite schools, which would not be feasible in smaller school districts. (RJM)

THE DISSEMINATION OF EDUCATIONAL INNOVATIONS:

NEW INSIGHTS INTO THE COACHING MODEL

by

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The Dissemination of Educational Innovations:
New Insights into the Coaching Model

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The Context for Successful Innovations

A major barrier to success of education reform efforts concerns the way in which program innovators, policy developers, and educational researchers think about and engage in disseminating innovations to school communities. Traditionally, the top-down model of development and dissemination of educational innovations has been the modus operandi. Historically, however, these models have failed to impact school communities in ways that evoke long-lasting curricular change (Cuban, 1984; Sedlak, Wheeler, Pullin, & Cusik, 1986; Elmore, 1987; Combs, 1988; Murphy, 1990).

One of the assumptions related to long lasting change is the necessity of viewing change as a recursive and longitudinal process in which the school community is engaged in a continuous and alternative process of investigation and exploration. This is followed by action grounded in exploration, which is then followed by further investigation and exploration (O'Loughlin & Cambell, 1988). In addition, innovators have to take into account that each member of the school community brings his/her unique interests and needs to the innovation. Thus, there are several issues facing innovators in establishing the context for building knowledge and enhancing practice.

First, innovators must develop some foundational knowledge that provides participants with both a conceptual framework for decision making and a shared language for talking about the innovation. In addition to abstract theoretical principles this framework needs to address specific classroom practices and activities. It has been shown that successful change efforts require the furnishing of specific, concrete, and usable remedies to educational problems (Crandall et al., 1982; McLaughlin, 1990); Gersten & Woodward, 1992).

Second, the school community must have control in designing and refining the educational innovation (Fullan, 1991). Therefore, the researcher/innovator and the school community need to create a context in which they can collaborate in co-constructing the innovation over time.

Third, schools are very complex organizations that require a systemic approach to change. Instead of seeing a series of events that are connected by a chain of cause and effect, school communities need to think of circular causality, patterns, interrelationships and the dynamic interactions between many different elements (Senge, 1994, 1995; Sparks & Hirsh, 1997).

The Dissemination of Innovations: the Coaching Model

There are many different ways to introduce innovations in schools and they may change over time in the life span of an innovation. Typically, when an educational innovation is developed at a university, the professor and her students will try out the innovation in one or several pilot schools. Once the innovation has been successfully introduced at the pilot schools, the university team must find ways to disseminate the innovative practices to more schools, so that more children can benefit from them. That is the time, when many university teams establish a center dedicated principally to the dissemination, research and evaluation of the innovation. This center becomes the hub for the innovation. (Accelerated Schools, Winter 1993; Slavin, Karweit, & Madden, 1989).

The center team will continue to work directly with several schools, but its capacity is limited. In order to reach more schools in more geographical regions, many innovation centers establish regional centers dedicated to the same purposes. The regional center teams will also first work directly with a number of schools. But as the innovation takes hold and more schools become interested this taxes their capacity and they have to find new dissemination agents. One way to secure systematic and controlled quality dissemination is to tap the existing educational structure. People from the schools and from central office will need to be trained to be the primary disseminators in order to reach large numbers of interested schools.

A good example for this dissemination process is the Accelerated Schools Project that has grown from two pilot schools in 1988/89 to over 1,000 schools at present. Before we analyze how the project has been able to expand so rapidly and to sustain its growth, we will give a summary description of the model.

The Accelerated Schools Project is a comprehensive approach to school change, designed to improve schooling for all children. In order to achieve this, school communities follow a philosophy and process that allow them to design their dream school and make it a reality. (Levin 1988, 1991,1996)

The philosophy of Accelerated Schools is built on three principles – unity of purpose, empowerment coupled with responsibility, and building on strengths. Unity of purpose refers to the school community working together to benefit all students. Empowerment coupled with responsibility expresses how the school community makes shared decisions and takes responsibility for implementing these decisions and for their consequences. In an accelerated school students,

teachers, and parents identify their own strengths and build on them when they confront their challenges.

The accelerated schools community shares a common set of values. Addressing the needs of all students requires trust among all members of the schools community, active participation by everyone, and open communication. Only with a sense of equity, the willingness to take risks and to engage in experimentation coupled with reflection will allow the school to create a powerful learning environment that will benefit all students. The school is seen as a community and a center of expertise.

These principles and values are brought together in the process of moving the school toward a shared vision in which all members of the school community participate. A process of self-discovery, called taking stock, allows the school to develop a common view of reality. The comparison between the vision and this shared reality produces a list of necessary changes that then are prioritized as challenge areas.

The school community divides into work teams, called cadres, in order to address these challenges. The cadres are "communities of inquiry" (St. John, Meza, Allen-Haynes, & Davidson 1996) that use a systemic approach to define and analyze the challenge areas of a school and to find lasting solutions to the problems encountered. A new governance structure connects the cadres to a democratic decision making process.

The formal components of the philosophy and process are the big wheels that move the schools towards its overall goals. While the school community is engaged in these big wheel processes, little wheels of innovation and personal change occur to create an environment in which change is produced and celebrated. (Brunner, Hopfenberg 1996) Both, big wheels and little wheels work together to create powerful learning for every child.

The dissemination model that the Accelerated Schools project has developed over time uses a combination of a National Center, regional centers that are responsible for the dissemination in several states, state initiatives with regional centers within a given state, and local centers at universities and district offices across the Nation. As part of the philosophy of the Accelerated Schools model, everyone working at one of these centers is directly involved with the developments at one or more schools. However, the rapid growth of accelerated schools is mainly due to trained coaches who either work at the district level or who are responsible for the implementation of the Accelerated Schools model at their own school.

Coaches are people who are well trained in the educational innovation and have the conceptual knowledge and the skills necessary to assist schools in deeply understanding the innovation and make it their own. The Accelerated Schools Project defined a coach as

> ... someone who helps guide, support, facilitate, encourage, and prod the school community as it uses the accelerated schools philosophy and process to transform itself. ... The coach's primary responsibility is to foster the conditions for a school community to effectively implement the accelerated schools model and reflect on its own development as it moves through the process. It is the coach's role to enable school members to explore the philosophy and to develop strategies for implementing the process, building capacity for creating long-lasting solutions that are in the best interest of the entire school community. (Accelerated Schools, Spring 1995, p. 9)

The role of an Accelerated Schools coach cannot be learned in a training course or from a manual. Coaches need a deep understanding of the philosophy and process of Accelerated Schools and a profound knowledge of the culture of the schools with which they work. This can be only learned through reflective practice as an ongoing developmental process over time.

Coaches need to constantly develop and refine their coaching skills in order to be able to help the schools build their own capacity, so that they can develop the necessary conceptual understanding of Accelerated Schools. They need to involve schools in the use of reflective practice, so that they can take ownership of the philosophy and process by embedding it into their own school culture and thereby transforming it. As Accelerated Schools is a systemic transformation of the school, the coach needs to see the "big picture." They need to help the schools articulate their needs and aspirations with the rules and regulations and policy requirements of the district. They also need to build the schools' leadership, so that they can negotiate with the district when restrictive policies hinder them from making their school the very best place for children.

Coaches are not leaders but help develop leadership in the school. Coaches do not have power but they can use persuasion. Coaches are not problem solvers but they help schools develop a process to solve their problems. Coaches never tell the schools what to do and how to do it but help schools to construct their own understanding of their strength and challenges and how to use their strength in overcoming their challenges.

The National Center found that coaches grow continuously in their knowledge and skills when they reflect on their coaching responsibilities over the years. Part of these responsibilities is to assist prospective schools in the initial exploration and buy-in process, train the entire school

community, provide on-going support and trouble shooting and build a network of support for accelerated schools (Accelerated Schools, Spring 1995, pp. 10-12).

The coach helps school to explore the Accelerated Schools model and to make a school-wide decision to become an accelerated school. She brings in accelerated schools materials, sets up visits to existing accelerated schools in the neighborhood, and invites speakers from accelerated schools, from one of the regional centers, or the National Center. The coach facilitates the meeting in which the school community decides on whether to become an accelerated school. Once the school has decided to become an accelerated school, the coach makes sure the district sets aside resources and times for whole school training and weekly follow-up visits.

The coach provides training for the entire school community. The initial training lasts typically two to three days. Additional training sessions are spaced over the entire year, whenever the school arrives at a crucial new element of the process; they number typically three to four days. At first the coach takes responsibility for the training but in the process she will involve faculty from the school to co-plan and co-deliver the training sessions.

The coach provides support to the school on a regular basis. During the schools creation of a shared vision and the taking stock process, she will attend the committee meetings and will make sure that both processes are transparent, that each member of the school community is involved, that deadlines are honored, decisions implemented, and results presented. Once the school has set its priorities and cadres are formed, the coach will join in cadre meetings to help build capacity, participate in steering committee sessions, and make sure that all school-wide decisions are made by the school as a whole. The coach is also an important resource for powerful learning. She helps schools to reflect on new powerful learning approaches and to select those that fit best their school vision and the principles and values of Accelerated Schools. In addition, the coach works closely with the principal to help her adjust to her new role in a democratic governance structure in which all school community members are actively involved in the decision making process.

Networking is one important way to maintain the spirit of accelerated schools alive and enrich the schools understanding with the experiences and successful strategies of other accelerated schools. The coach is instrumental in organizing networks among different groups of the school community. She may organize parent and volunteer networks, teacher networks and principal networks, and she will make sure that the schools have an opportunity to participate in state-wide meetings and the national conferences.

A coach's job is demanding and time consuming and fraught with joys and frustrations. It is never an easy job and it is never the same. Each school is different and each situation has to be appraised afresh. There are no canned responses. That is why the National Center makes sure that a coach has at least 25% of her time to dedicate to a pilot school. Even second and third year schools still need a lot of attention and time from the coach. Thus, coaches or coaching teams need to make sure that they do not take on too many schools.

Initially the National Center worked directly with the whole school community of their pilot schools. When the team wanted to expand after two years, it trained school teams consisting of the principal, two to three teachers, a parent representative, and a representative from the district office. These teams were to go back to their schools and train the whole school. With little continuing support from the National Center staff, many of these teams floundered. That is when the Center decided to look for dedicated people at the district level, state department, and universities who would have time and flexibility to work first with one and later with several schools in their location.

These individuals were carefully selected and trained at the National Center in an eight-day training session. Furthermore, they had a personal mentor from the National Center who would keep in contact with them by phone, fax, and e-mail; and they received two site visits per year. At the end of each school year they participated in a retreat with all their fellow coaches from the initial training.

The National Center found that in their training, the off-site coaches consistently outperformed the teams of teachers from interested schools they had trained formerly. Their training experts summarized this experience as follows:

> We have found that the most effective methods of implementing the accelerated schools philosophy and process and building capacity for sustained change is through the use of highly trained regional coaches who work with the school on a regular basis. These individuals are drawn from district offices, state departments of education, and universities; many have worked in schools for years as teachers and principals. (Accelerated Schools, Spring 1995, p. 9)

The Center staff believes that there are several reasons why off-site coaches were more effective. First, as outsiders they were not caught up in the history of the school and did not have to take sides in school conflicts. Thus, their assistance was more objective and unbiased.

Second, they came into the school and trained the whole school community. In that way they provided a level playing field for everyone and more unity. There was no team of "designated experts" in the school who knew more about Accelerated Schools and therefore would be considered the ones responsible for implementation.

Third, off-site coaches could build support for accelerated schools in their own organizations. They could act as liaisons between the two organizations and make sure that their organization's policies were aligned with the Accelerated Schools philosophy. They could also look for additional resources at their organization to be channeled to the school.

Fourth, off-site coaches had more flexibility to train and follow-up a number of schools and thus, could build a network among them. The National Center found this new training model so successful, that it proposed to all regional centers to move from their traditional models of whole school training or school team training to the coaching model.

In this paper we present our research concerning the dissemination of the Accelerated Schools philosophy and process in which we examine how one regional center implemented the coaching model outlined by the National Center for the Accelerated Schools. Our analysis is based on the experiences of the University of New Orleans (UNO) Accelerated Schools Center. We used an assortment of research methodologies to obtain data such as interviews with coaches, principals, and teachers; site visits and direct observations; document review; archival records; and evaluation reports.

An Evolving Coaching model at the University of New Orleans Accelerated Schools Center

The regional Center at UNO was established in 1990. It started to work with three pilot schools in 1990/91 and currently attends 22 schools in 20 districts in Louisiana, two schools in Mississippi, and 11 schools in Tennessee. The Center is staffed with three research associates and a project director. From 1990 to 1994, the Center team worked directly with the schools, a total number of 21 in 1994, travelling across the state to visit and train them in regular intervals and to build up a network.

When more schools wanted to join in 1994/95, the UNO center team developed a new training model according to the design proposed by the National Center and started to train two coaches and the principals of 12 schools from 11 districts.

The Center team had hoped to recruit knowledgeable persons from the districts who would take on their role as a coach for accelerated schools as an important part of their work. In this way the district could slowly transform all its schools into accelerated schools. The example of a successful pilot school would attract more schools from the district to the program, and the more schools would be successful, the more attractive would the program become in the district.

Because of the way the funding was structured by the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE), the UNO Center could not recruit coaches directly and select them for training as stipulated by the National Center model. As the funding was earmarked for schools, schools had to first be selected before the UNO Center could look for coaches. Once the schools had been accepted, the UNO asked the districts to submit names of two qualified people who would be willing to become coaches for these schools.

Only one district responded by designating two coaches from the central office. Four districts sent one central office coach each, the remaining six districts disregarded the request. In order to adhere to the requirement of the model to have off-site people coach the schools, the team asked experienced teachers from successful accelerated schools to become coaches and accepted three. In two districts there were no accelerated schools and the team had to accept experienced teachers from neighboring schools. Even then the team did not find enough off-site coaches. It finally resorted to selecting five teacher leaders from the faculty of four accepted schools. In three schools there were no teacher volunteers and the principals became coaches together with one member of the UNO team. As the coaches come from so many different situations, the team decided to invite all principals from the accepted schools in order to provide a cohesive element.

The training for the off-site coaches in Louisiana consisted in a five-day workshop during the summer, in which the future coaches became familiar with the Accelerated Schools philosophy and process and designed their training units for the schools with which they were going to work. An additional training of two days followed at about mid-year. Throughout the year, the coaches were mentored by the UNO Center staff. They also received help with the initial training sessions at the school site.

The coaches also participated in the three network meetings that are held each year. In these meetings they had the opportunity to interact with principals and teachers from successful

accelerated schools. An end-of-the-year retreat was organized for principals and coaches to reflect on the past year and to develop a plan of action for the upcoming year.

During the first year all coaches were only allowed to work with one school – their pilot school. If their efforts were successful, they could start with additional schools the following year.

A detailed analysis of the participating schools shows that of the six district coaches that were trained in 1994/95 three continued to coach the following year, two of them are still coaching at present. None of the teachers from neighboring accelerated schools continued the second year. The coaches from other neighboring schools also did not continue. The five in-house teacher coaches all continue to be coaches until the present. The three principals did not continue as coaches. One school dropped out of the project.

Table 1 (see Appendix A) gives a detailed account of the history of the change in coaches for the schools that entered the project in 1994/95. The names of the schools have been changed in order to provide anonymity.

In 1995/96 the UNO Center expanded to other states and only trained the coaches for six schools in Louisiana. There were four coaches from central office, six teacher leaders from the participating schools, and two principals that served as coaches. The UNO team did not accept teachers from neighboring schools because the experience of the previous year had shown them that these coaches did not find enough time to serve their assigned schools. The training followed the same format as the previous year. Three network meetings were held, as well as the end-of-the-year retreat.

After one year three of the district coaches did not continue, all six in-house coaches and both principals continued the second year. Five in-house coaches and one principal continue to coach at the present time. One school dropped out of the project.

Table 2 (see Appendix A) gives a detailed account of the history of the change in coaches for the Louisiana schools that entered the project in 1995/96. The names of the schools have been changed in order to provide anonymity

A comparison of the different types of coaches shows that those coaches who were not part of the school community did not have enough time to dedicate themselves to the intensive training and follow-up the Accelerated Schools model requires. Teacher coaches from neighboring schools were the least effective. In most cases they had to teach their regular hours and did not receive any

release time for the work at their pilot school. Most of them were only able to deliver the formal training sessions but were not present when the school needed them for support in developing a shared vision, taking stock of their current situation and setting priorities for systematic change. The schools these teacher coaches attended lagged far behind in the process at the end of the first year. All of these teachers did not continue as coaches after the first year.

Coaches from Central Office had the same problem with time commitment. Although they had more flexibility than the teacher coaches, they ended up spending very little time at the schools beyond the official training dates. Several district coaches dropped out of the project after the first year. However, some of these district people did not want to give up their position as coaches, but they continue to be coaches in name only, hardly ever visiting their schools.

Most principals who were trained as coaches felt that they did not have enough time to fulfil both roles optimally. They also perceived a role conflict and, therefore, did not continue. Only one principal continues to coach and is successful.

The in-house coaches recruited from teacher leaders were by far the most successful coaches. Although they did not get any release time for their additional work, they were able to move their schools along at an acceptable pace. All of these coaches stayed on after the first year, and most of them continue to be coaches at present.

Table 3 (see Appendix A) gives a visual account of the effectiveness of the coaches in terms of their attendance at the coaches training of the UNO Center and their continuation as coaches after the first year.

District Coaches or In-house Coaches – a Comparison of their Effectiveness

A more detailed analysis of the effectiveness of the coaches of both years shows that only the teacher leaders selected from within the participating schools devoted enough time to train the whole school community in the philosophy and process of Accelerated Schools throughout the year. They not only organized all formal training sessions but were there when the school community had difficulties with the different parts of the process.

A comparison between the effectiveness of the district coaches and the in-house coaches showed marked differences in the way they performed their roles. We found nine important areas in which they acted differently.

Initial Training of the School Community. During their training with the UNO Center team both groups designed their training units for the schools and arranged with the district for release time, so that the whole faculty could participate in all training sessions. (Kirby & Meza, 1997). With the exception of one district coach, they all accomplished the initial training of two days. But when district business caught up with them, several district coaches were no longer able to provide the on-going training necessary for a deep conceptual understanding and a shared language. The in-house coaches were more flexible and were able to organize training sessions, even when the district did not provide the needed release time.

In the case of one school with two district coaches, both coaches found so little time to attend the schools that a UNO Center mentor had to take over the role of the coach. Because of the lack of support from the original coaches the progress of the school was delayed to such a degree that the school community after three years still functioned on the level of a first-year school.

Knowledge of the School Culture. One way of making sure that the school takes ownership of the innovation is to embed it into the existing school culture or to change the school culture in such a way that it is able to embrace the innovation. Much of the school culture is not written or spoken of frequently. It consists of beliefs, norms, rules, values and aspirations the school community adheres to in an unspoken consensus. The district coaches knew the schools in a more general way, but they did not know when the Accelerated Schools message coincided or conflicted with the culture and were, therefore, at a loss when the school did not take to the process. The in-house coaches could use a more intuitive approach, as they were part of that culture. However even some of them had difficulty matching the new philosophy with the traditional belief system of the school. The new ways of looking at children, the new democratic governance structures and particularly the Inquiry process for problem solving were difficult to bring across, even with a deep knowledge of the school culture.

In one school the two in-house coaches were particularly successful introducing the three principles of Accelerated Schools. After the first year, the school was advanced enough in the process to have its governance structure in place. One of the first school-wide decisions was to sponsor clubs that met during school time and were based on the interests of the students. One hundred percent of the faculty volunteered their time to organize these clubs, building on the strengths of their students and their own. With this decision they could experience the power of unity of purpose.

Commitment to Successful Implementation. Initially both groups were committed to a successful implementation of the Accelerated Schools model in their pilot schools. But when time went on and the coaches became aware that school change is a very slow and tedious process with many frustrations built in, the district coaches could not resist the temptation to focus more on the other parts of their work where success was easier and they could be more effective in a short period of time. The in-house coaches did not have that choice. Their reputation was at stake and they had a more burning desire for the school to succeed because they would share in the benefits. This helped them to weather the storms and to continue even in frustrating times.

In one case the persistence on the part of an in-house coach moved the school forward despite the initial lack of interest of most of the faculty and a principal who supported Accelerated Schools in name only. She was able to introduce the new governance structure and set up an organizational framework that enabled the cadres to stay focused and to communicate effectively among each other.

Credibility of the Coach as an Expert in the Accelerated Schools Model. All district coaches had a good track record in their district and were respected by their pilot schools. However, as they were not a member of the school community they first had to establish themselves as experts. Some of them lost their credibility as coaches when they were not able to move the school forward and when they were not available when conflicts arose. In some instances, the district coaches had imagined coaching accelerated schools similar to their traditional training tasks in the district and were dismayed to find how time consuming it is to work with a whole school community on altering profound belief systems and ingrained habits. Their disappointment at their ineffectiveness led them to abandon the school. The in-house coaches were teacher leaders and highly respected in their schools. Therefore, they did not have problems with credibility as one might suspect. In fact, in most schools this initial credibility helped the coaches to even bring across difficult concepts or to open up traditional practices for critical reflection when they were not in line with the Accelerated Schools philosophy. The in-house coaches had the advantage that beyond the initial training they lived the philosophy and process on a daily basis.

School Conflict. When there were conflicts at the school, the district coaches were in a better position to stay outside the conflict and to mediate. In-house coaches were sometimes caught in conflicts and did not have the moral authority to mediate. However, most of the time their status as teacher leaders assisted them in working through conflict situations.

In one district some members of the school board wanted to dismiss the superintendent. This conflict filtered down into the schools and teachers took sides with the issue. Particularly in one accelerated school the conflict between the faculty became very pronounced. Using the philosophy of Accelerated Schools the in-house coach was able to bring unity to the faculty and to focus them on their shared vision.

Relationship between Principal and Coach. Most principals initially have a hard time with the Accelerated Schools model. On the one hand, they have to share power and authority in a new governance structure at the school and they have to accept decisions made by the school as a whole with which they may not always agree. On the other hand, they are still held responsible for whatever happens at the school by the district. A district coach is therefore often appreciated by the principal as an influential ally in the journey and a spokesperson for the concerns of the school. Given the traditional hierarchy in school districts, the district coaches were also considered legitimate experts, and their views were appreciated by the principal. Most in-house coaches were highly respected by their principals as teacher leaders, yet when the principal had a different opinion, these coaches had a much harder time to prevail. They had to justify their opinions, rally other teachers, prove their point with documentation, or even call the UNO Center mentor for support.

Even some district coaches were not able to establish an in-depth working relationship between themselves and the principal. In the case of one of the schools that dropped out of the project after one year, the principal was never willing to change her leadership style. Although the district coaches established the governance structure and the faculty worked in cadres, the teachers never took ownership of the process and waited for directives of the principal.

Time Commitment to continued Training and Coaching. The National Center estimated that off-site coaches need 25% of their time to work with their pilot school during the first year (Accelerated Schools, 1995, p. 10). Due to that requirement, the participating districts in Louisiana had committed time for the whole school training sessions and for the coaches. However, the district coaches found it difficult to organize their work load in such a way that they really had enough time to be at the schools at least once a week for a substantial time, sitting in on cadre meetings, organizing additional training sessions and working through difficult situations. Given the unstructured nature of their work with accelerated schools and the ambiguities of coaching, many district coaches gave priority to those tasks that were highly structured and with secure outcomes.

When these were done, there was often no time left for their pilot schools. In addition, some coaches were given a workload that did not allow them to take enough time for the Accelerated Schools Project.

The in-house coaches did not receive any compensation time for their additional workload. They had to reorganize their day to fit in the additional responsibilities. This meant working additional hours paid for with their own time. Particularly their meetings with the UNO Center mentors and their preparations for training sessions were not paid for. They only received time for the training sessions at the school site as the whole faculty had release time for the training and for the state-wide network meetings. Once the school communities had established their priorities and had started to work in cadres on their problem areas, the coaches did not participate in any specific cadre but used that time to visit different cadres and to assist them in their work. None of the schools had release time for their work in the cadres.

Availability and Flexibility. Most district coaches planned their schedule months ahead because of the many district activities they were involved in. Their pilot schools could reach them at certain hours at the district office, but the coach could seldom participate in cadre, steering committee, or school as a whole meetings. Even when they scheduled their time around the needs of the school they did not have the required flexibility to come to the school at short notice or to change their visits, when the school changed their meeting times. Training and coaching and even trouble shooting had to happen at certain fixed hours set by the district coach. The in-house coaches were available throughout the school day. They could adapt easily to schedule changes in the school. Much of their coaching was done in an informal way.

Follow-up. Important tasks of a coach are to make sure that communication flows smoothly between the cadres, steering committee and the schools as a whole, and that all decisions are transparent and acted upon. Coaches need to keep records on the activities in the school and make sure that all meeting minutes are posted, so that everyone in the school is informed. They need especially to make sure that the cadres develop action plans for each decision taken by the school as a whole and that these plans are implemented. Due to their workload and their inflexible schedules, most district coaches could not keep pace with the school activities and were not able to perform these follow-up services. The in-house coaches also had problems making sure that communication flowed smoothly. But generally they were more able to supervise the process closely. Table 4 (see

Appendix A) gives a summary of the differences we found between district coaches and the coaches who were selected from teacher leaders at the schools.

Difficulties with the Coaching Model of the National Center in its Implementation at Regional Centers

When the National Center worked with different coaching models and found that people from district offices, state departments, and universities working with schools of their choice were the most successful coaches, it wanted to make sure that the existing regional centers adopted the same model. For that purpose National Center staff went to the regional centers and trained their teams in the new coaching model and discussed with them the selection criteria.

As we have seen in the case of the UNO Accelerated Schools Center, the conditions in Louisiana were so different, that the model could not be replicated successfully. In our reflection on the case we found that several elements helped to make the off-site coaching model highly effective at the national level when certain conditions that only pertain to the national level were present.

In what follows we summarize our thoughts about the favorable conditions that were present at the National Center and the difficulties the UNO Center had in matching these conditions. When the National Center started with the coaching model in 1993, the Accelerated Schools Project had been widely publicized and had already established a nation-wide reputation. Many educators were eager to become part of the project and the call for coaches was seen by them as an avenue to become deeply involved with a very successful school reform project and possibly establish a local center for accelerated schools. The applications came from many states in the nation and from highly qualified people. Most of them were members of large school districts, state departments or important universities. Thus, the National Center had the opportunity to select from a large group of highly qualified applicants the very best.

Although the first training session was funded by a grant, in subsequent years the trainees had to pay for the training with a substantial amount of money. The institutions that sent the applicants had the financial resources to pay for the training. In addition, a contract with the trainees further insured that their institutions would support their work with the accelerated schools in their location.

Even under these favorable conditions, the National Center found that not all of their trainees became the powerful coaches they wanted them to be. The main reason for trained coaches

to be less successful in their work or to drop from the project was time. In a 1995 Newsletter the National Center writes (Accelerated Schools, 1995, p. 12):

> Although we have had great success with the coaching model, one of the greatest challenges rests in the fact, that in working with district offices, state departments and universities coaches can be pulled in many directions. Coaches often have many roles to fulfill outside of their work with accelerated schools, and as a result their time with the school is often stretched thin. For this reason, it is extremely beneficial to have full-time coaches working with accelerated schools whenever possible. Where districts, states, and universities have made a commitment to full-time coaches we find that they have a greater ability to really get to know the school(s), learn how to manage the many different responsibilities that are required of them, and begin to build institutional support for accelerated schools.

As we mentioned above, the intent of the UNO Accelerated Schools Center was to implement the coaching model developed by the National Center. However the conditions dictated the way in which the Louisiana model was structured. Given that Louisiana ranks among all states at the bottom in education, there is very little interest in educational reform. Few educators are willing to risk their positions and try something new. Furthermore, the Accelerated Schools model had only been active in the state for a period of three years and was not yet well known and educators were not familiar with the model. Thus, educators were not standing in line to jump on the band wagon.

We also mentioned that because of the funding structure the UNO Center first had to select schools and then had to find qualified people that could serve as coaches. Most of the districts did not see the importance of selecting people with good leadership skills but took anyone willing to assume the task. In an earlier analysis, the UNO staff writes (Kirby & Meza 1997, p. 84):

> When asked why they [coaches] were selected by their districts the overwhelming majority responded they were selected primarily because they were "willing" and "available." Because the districts were asked to nominate coaches who would commit to summer training, many coaches felt they were chosen because others were unwilling to give up a week of summer vacation. ....It is unfortunate that selection as a coach was perceived more as a responsibility for additional work rather than as an honor. Coaches were being asked to assume new leadership roles in their districts, yet no one mentioned leadership skills as the reason for being selected.

There was no true selection process because the Center had a difficult time finding enough coaches for all schools and had to take all people nominated by the districts. In some cases the staff of the district offices was so small that it was not possible to submit a list of qualified people. Other

districts had no available people and the Center team had to find teachers and principals from neighboring schools to serve as off-site coaches.

There was no charge for the training and the school districts were only responsible for paying the expenses incurred. Most of the Louisiana districts have a very small budget and while they could afford to pay for the expenses, they were not able to pay their coaches a stipend for the additional work.

Certainly time became a critical issue for the success of the coaches. Only those coaches who could really spend time in the schools and participate in the Accelerated Schools activities on a regular basis were able to guide the school community through the philosophy and process. District coaches and teachers/principals from neighboring schools soon found out that their own job responsibilities were so demanding that they could not find the time to be there for the schools when they needed them. Even though there was a signed agreement from the superintendent authorizing the time commitment at all levels, none of the off-site coaches blocked out half a day each week for their commitment to the pilot school. Thus, other duties took priority and over the year the visits to the school became less frequent. An immediate result of this was that almost all off-site coaches resigned after their first year as is shown in Table 4. Kirby and Meza (1997, p. 86) report:

> Those who worked in other schools found difficulty in getting away from their home school to attend meetings or conduct training in the pilot school. ....Thus, the burden of being a coach revolved primarily around finding time to be at the pilot school. Even those teachers who worked in the pilot school felt guilty taking time away from their classrooms.

Conclusions

Our analysis provides evidence that the coaching model of the National Center works well under certain conditions. It is important to have a pool of highly qualified applicants coming from large institutions that can afford to designate and pay a person to work with accelerated schools. There should be enough applicants to be able to make a selection to find "the best of the best". Even then the National Center acknowledges that in order to be truly successful the coach has to be able to work full time with accelerated schools. The advantage of these off-site coaches is that they can create local accelerated schools centers and networks of schools.

At the regional level, particularly in states with many small districts this model is not feasible. It is not realistic to expect that there are many educators available in these districts who could exclusively dedicate themselves to accelerated schools. Many districts at best could only

afford to allow release time for a part time coach, and some of them would not even have the luxury of staff available to handle the task. In these cases the regional centers need to take the responsibility of selecting in-house coaches to service the schools. The important tasks of networking and finding funds expected of off-site coaches need to be assumed by the center in order to provide complete and continuous assistance to the schools.

This study shows that a dissemination model that is successful at one level of the educational innovation may prove to be inapplicable at other levels. Therefore, it is important to analyze the prevailing conditions under which the model operates in optimal conditions, and only if these conditions are met should the model be replicated without revisions. When that is not the case, the centers have to carefully study what adaptations they need to make in order to make the model work.

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APPENDIX A:

TABLE 1: HISTORY OF THE CHANGE IN COACHES FOR THE ACCELERATED SCHOOLS THAT ENTERED THE PROJECT IN THE 1994/95 SCHOOL YEAR

NAME OF SCHOOL	POSITION OF COACH	COMMENTS
Butler Elementary	Central Office	Did not attend the 1994 summer training. Served one year, was replaced for the 1995-1996 school year.
	Teacher from another school	Did not attend the 1994 summer training. Served one year, was replaced for the 1995-1996 school year.
	Teacher from an accelerated school	Did not attend the 1995 summer training. Served for one year, was replaced for the 1996-1997 school year.
	Teacher at Butler	Did not attend the 1996 summer training. Continues to serve.
Carver Elementary	Teacher at another accelerated school	Attended the 1991 summer training. Served for one year, was replaced for the 1996-1997 school year.
	Principal of Carver School	Attended the 1995 summer training. Served as Principal and coach for one year. Remained as Principal but did not serve as coach for the 1996-1997 school year.
	Teacher at Carver	Attended the 1996 summer training and continues to serve.
	Teacher at Carver	Did not attend the 1996 summer training. Served for two years, retired from teaching in 1997.
	Teacher at Carver	Attended the 1997 summer training and continues to serve.
Forrest Elementary	Central Office	Attended the 1994 summer training and continues to serve.
	Central Office	Attend the 1994 summer training. Served one year, was replaced for the 1995-1996 school year.
	Central Office	Did not attend the 1996 summer training. Continues to serve. Two teachers from Forrest were selected as coaches for the 1997-1998 school year.
	Teacher at Forrest	Attended the 1997 summer training.
	Teacher at Forrest	Attended the 1997 summer training
General Lee Elementary	Principal	Did not attend the 1994 training. Does not continue as coach.
		A UNO mentor coached the school and continues to do so.
Hillsboro Elementary	Principal	Attended the 1994 training. Does not continue as coach.
		A UNO mentor coached the school and continues to do so.

Lawrence Elementary	Teacher at Lawrence	Attended the 1994 summer training. Continues to serve.
	Teacher at Lawrence	Attended the 1994 summer training. Continues to serve.
Maple Grove Elementary	Teacher at Maple Grove	Attended the 1994 summer training. Continues to serve.
	Central Office	Attended the 1994 summer training. Served for one year, was replaced for the 1995-1996 school year.
	Teacher at Maple Grove	Attended the 1995 summer training. Continues to serve.
Pickett Elementary	Teacher at another accelerated school	Attended the 1991 summer training. Served for one year. Pickett Elementary resigned from the project.
	Teacher at another accelerated school	Attended the 1991 summer training. Served one year. Pickett Elementary resigned from the project.
Roseland Elementary	Central Office	Did not attend the 1994 summer training. Continues to serve.
	Teacher at Roseland	Did not attend the 1994 summer training. Continues to serve.
Spring Hill Elementary	Teacher at Spring Hill	Attended the 1994 summer training. Continues to serve.
	Teacher at Spring Hill	Attended the 1994 summer training. Continues to serve.
Thornton Elementary	Teacher at Thornton	Attended the 1994 summer training. Continues to serve.
	Teacher at Thornton	Attended the 1994 summer training. Continues to serve.
Willow Creek Elementary	Central Office	Did not attend the 1994 summer training. Served one year, was replaced for the 1995-1996 school year.
	Teacher at another school (not an accelerated school)	Attended the 1994 summer training. Served one year, was replaced for the 1995-1996 school year.
	Teacher at Willow Creek	Attended the 1995 summer training. Served two years, was replaced for the 1997-1998 school year.
	Speech therapist, part time at Willow Creek	Attended the 1997 summer training. Continues to serve.

Source: UNO Center records

TABLE 2: HISTORY OF THE CHANGE IN COACHES FOR THE ACCELERATED SCHOOLS THAT ENTERED THE PROJECT IN THE 1995/96 SCHOOL YEAR

Austin Elementary	Central Office	Attended the 1995 summer training. Served one and a half years. Austin Elementary resigned from the project.
	Central Office	Attended the 1995 summer training. Served one and a half years. Austin Elementary resigned from the project.
Briar Crest Elementary	Central Office	Attended the 1995 summer. Served one year, was replaced for the 1996-1997 school year.
	Teacher at Briar Crest	Attended the 1995 summer training. Continues to serve.
	Teacher at Briar Crest	Attended the 1996 summer training. Continues to serve.
Cottonwood Elementary	Teacher at Cottonwood	Did not attend the 1995 summer training. Continues to serve.
	Teacher at Cottonwood	Did not attend the 1995 summer training. Served one year, was replaced for the 1996-1997 school year.
	Teacher at Cottonwood	Did not attend the 1995 summer training. Served one year, was replaced for the 1996-1997 school year.
	Teacher at Cottonwood	Did not attend the 1995 summer training. Continues to serve.
Deerburg Elementary	Teacher at Deerburg	Attended the 1995 summer training. Continues to serve.
	Teacher at Deerburg	Attended the 1995 summer training. Continues to serve.
Elm Street Elementary	Principal at Elm Street	Attended the 1995 summer training. Continues to serve.
	Principal at another accelerated school	Attended the 1995 summer training. Served one year, was not yet replaced.
Fulton Elementary	Central Office	Attended the 1997 summer training. Continues to serve.
	Teacher at Fulton	Attended the 1997 summer training. Continues to serve.

Source: UNO Center records

TABLE 3: EFFECTIVENESS OF COACHES IN TERMS OF THEIR ATTENDENCE OF THE COACHES TRAINING AND THEIR CONTINUATION AS COACHES AFTER THE FIRST YEAR

TYPE OF COACH	NUMBER OF COACHES IN 1994/95 AND 1995/96	ATTENDED SUMMER TRAINING	DID NOT ATTEND SUMMER TRAINING*	COACHED ONLY THE FIRST YEAR	CONTINUES TO COACH IN 1997/98
DISTRICT COACHES	10	9	1	7	1 (2 in name only)
TEACHER COACHES FROM OTHER SCHOOLS	5	4	1	5	0
PRINCIPALS AS COACHES	5	4	1	3	1 (1 in name only)
TEACHER LEADERS AS IN-HOUSE COACHES	12	11	1	0	12

Source: Comparison of the data available in UNO Center records

* The coaches who did not participate in the summer training worked closely with a UNO mentor during the first year and learned about the philosophy and process of Accelerated Schools through their conversations with the mentor and the existing documentation.

TABLE 4:
DIFFERENCES IN EFFECTIVENESS BETWEEN DISTRICT COACHES AND IN-HOUSE COACHES

	DISTRICT COACHES	IN-HOUSE COACHES
Initial training of the school community	Most coaches did the initial training for the faculty but had no time for ongoing training. Some did no whole school training.	All coaches did the initial training of the faculty and they continued to offer training units while the school continued in the process
Knowledge of the school culture	Most coaches had a general knowledge of the school gained from their work with the principal. There was little knowledge of the history of the school and its patterns for problem solving.	Most coaches had deep knowledge of the school culture – its values, norms and rules. There was a good understanding of the school history and its patterns for problem solving. Lack of distance from historical events skewed some of the coaches' perceptions.
Commitment to successful implementation	Most coaches showed little interest for the school to succeed. The Accelerated Schools Project was only one task in a list of important assignments.	School success was very important. The reputation of the coach was linked to successful implementation.
Credibility of the coach as an expert in Accelerated Schools	Initially there was high credibility particularly if there was a track record of good work at the district level. Some coaches lost credibility when the school did not see progress and when the coach was not available.	Generally school leaders were selected to become coaches. They had high credibility. A strong presence in the faculty was an asset.
School Conflict	The coaches were mostly able to maintain themselves outside the conflict and could serve as mediators.	The coaches were sometimes caught in the conflict and needed to find outside mediators.
Relationship principal - coach	Coaches were seen as outside experts. They could often influence the principal. Their opinions were highly regarded.	Some coaches had difficulty to establish their role as experts. Their judgment would not persuade the principal. Often they needed to back up their statements with documentation or ask for input from the university mentor.
Time commitment to continued training and coaching	The district committed to give additional time exclusively for coaching accelerated schools. Yet some coaches did not get the promised time and others did not use their time as promised.	The teachers did not receive any release time for coaching. They had to make time from their schedule to be effective. They were advised not be members of a cadre in order to visit all cadres.
Availability and Flexibility	Most coaches had a fixed schedule and were only available in their offices at certain times during the week. School visits were planned ahead of time and could not be changed. A change in plans at the school site could not be accommodated	The coaches were available all day. Informal coaching happened at any time of the day. Meetings could be switched and new times were possible because the coach could always be reached.
Follow-up	Coaches had difficulty in following up the different parts of the Accelerated Schools process. They had problems to supervise decisions, to keep records and to make sure that minutes were posted and distributed.	Coaches were able to supervise the Accelerated Schools process very closely.

Sources: Mentor observations, UNO Center records, school records.

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